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First Steps for Addressing Speech and Language Problems

Identifying a Possible Problem

Spoken communication is the way that a lot of learning takes place, whether in the classroom, on the playground, or at home. So speech and language problems can interfere with many aspects of your child's learning and development. In addition, problems with oral language can be an early signal that a child will struggle with reading and writing. For both these reasons, early identification and treatment of speech and language problems is very important.

Your child's teacher may be the first to observe that your child's speaking or listening skills are not at the level expected for kids his age. The teacher may notice that your child has trouble responding aloud to her questions about a story he has just heard, or following her spoken instructions for classroom assignments.

A teacher's observations may confirm your own sense that your child has more difficulty than other kids his age expressing himself in words. When he speaks, he may struggle to express his thoughts fluently. When he describes an event or object, he may fill in with words like "stuff" or "thing" because he has trouble finding the exact word he's looking for. He may seem inattentive when you speak to him, or to only hear parts of what you say.

Evaluating the Problem

When a child has oral language problems — with speaking or listening — a speech and language therapist can diagnose the child's specific problems and help build needed skills. Whether your child is assessed through your public school or by a private practitioner, the speech and language therapist will likely be one of several people who help put together a profile of your child's learning strengths and needs. Other members of the team may include your pediatrician, your child's teachers, or a psychologist (either at school or in private practice) who specializes in evaluating children with learning difficulties.

Evaluation by a speech and language specialist may include interviews with parents and teachers, classroom observations, and assessment of your child's oral and written communications skills. In some situations the specialist will work with classroom teachers to develop remediation strategies for your child. The broad categories used by most speech and language specialists to evaluate a child are:

- **Expressive language** — A child's ability to communicate with other people, through speaking or writing.
- **Receptive language** — A child's understanding of the information he receives through spoken or written communication.
- **Articulation** — A child's ability to pronounce words correctly.

A common first step in identifying a speech or language problem is to rule out other possible causes for the behaviors you or your child's teacher observe. Your pediatrician can evaluate your child's

hearing, overall health and development, nutrition, and sleep patterns, to make sure these are not contributing to a problem.

Finding a Speech and Language Specialist

First, request a speech and language evaluation from your local school district. If the school district is unable to evaluate your child, or if you want the district's evaluation "fine tuned," you will want to engage a private speech and language therapist. Ask school staff, friends, or your pediatrician for their recommendations of speech and language specialists they know who are skilled and effective with children. When you interview a speech and language professional to work with your child, you may find our worksheet, Questions to Ask Speech and Language Specialists, helpful for organizing questions and recording information. Suggested questions include:

- What settings have you worked in?
- What is your experience as a clinician?
- Do you develop a written plan with goals and objectives?

If money issues are a barrier to getting your child evaluated, check for free or low-cost services for kids with learning difficulties in your community.

By observing and trying to understand the source of your child's struggles, you've taken an important first step. A speech and language specialist can take you several steps further along the path of getting your child the help he needs.

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About the Contributors

Linda Broatch, Writer/Editor, has an M.A. in Education, with a focus in Child Development, personal experience in supporting those who have learning difficulties, and has worked for many years in nonprofit organizations that serve the health and education needs of children.

Other Resources

Websites

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Language-Based Learning Disabilities

<http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/Language-Based-Learning-Disabilities.htm>

American Academy of Family Physicians

Speech and Language Delay: What Does This Mean for My Child?

<http://familydoctor.org/442.xml>



SchwabLearning.org

A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids With Learning Difficulties

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Questions to Ask Speech & Language Specialists Worksheet

Questions	Notes
What is your experience evaluating and treating speech and language disorders?	
What is your experience working with schools?	
What credentials and training do you have for speech and language therapy?	
Do you evaluate expressive and receptive language, as well as articulation skills?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
How much does the assessment and report cost?	\$ _____
How long will the assessment take?	_____ minutes
When will we receive a written report that explains the test results?	
Do you develop a written plan for remediation, with goals and objectives?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
How long is each remediation session?	_____ minutes
What is your fee for each remediation session?	\$ _____
Do you have a sliding fee scale?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
How would you work with my child's teacher and other involved professionals?	
Do you currently have a regularly scheduled time available?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

This worksheet offers **suggested** questions to ask when interviewing a speech and language specialist. Parents are in the best position to decide which questions are appropriate for their family and in their circumstances. Please delete, revise, or add questions to make the worksheet most suitable for your needs.